

## Introduction

Never before has the discipline of Arabic language and literature been as multifaceted as today. Since the mid-nineteenth century, it has achieved extraordinary results in the areas of manuscript editing, philology and literary history. Only lately and cautiously has it begun to open itself to the inquiries of literary research and criticism. Meanwhile, during this process of searching beyond the borders of its discipline, such a variety of concepts and methods has ensued that many scholars move on solitary paths of foreign theories, far beyond the confines of the discipline and the purview of their mentors.

Border-crossing definitions of subject and method have become the norm. Only at the beginning of the twentieth century had the study of culture (*Kulturwissenschaft*) emancipated itself as representational "understanding through explaining" from the holistic inductive experiencing of the humanistic disciplines and the empiricism of the exact sciences. But soon thereafter, a new process of internationalization began in the exact sciences, which influenced, after World War II, also the social sciences, psychology, linguistics, and step by step finally reached the humanities. Last among these, the philological disciplines opened themselves to a pluralism of discourses and methods. With this, their areas and methods of research, as they had been practiced, could be enlarged and diversified through external impulses and imported ideas.<sup>1</sup>

These are without question an enrichment to our philological discipline, for only an understanding from multiple perspectives can grasp the complex aspects of literature and literary culture. Indeed, only a sophisticated application of modern literary theory can do justice to literary composition. Theory helps avoid the pitfalls of overly literal readings that restrict the life of a text to the written page, and theory also allows one to unearth the more implicit aspects of a text. Philology, with its reliance on detail, and literary theory, with its ability to paint a holistic picture – however preliminary – can benefit from each other in the quest to understand Near Eastern literatures. Notwithstanding this, one rightly wonders, in the face of these diverging trends, how the study of Near Eastern literatures is to be saved from losing itself in an archipelago of emerging sub-discourses. How can the field be reunified and reintegrated?

This is where the present volume will make its contribution. It is a work in progress, showing a spectrum of individual articles that grapple with extremely diverse approaches and their application and adaptation to Near Eastern literatures. By publishing these, we wish to foster exchange and cooperation within each of the Near Eastern philological subfields as well as between them. To this end, contributions about Turkish and Iranian literatures have been included alongside those on Arabic literature.<sup>2</sup> We hold the mutual exchange between the diverse discourses in these subfields to be a crucial prerequisite for a convergent methodological regrouping of our areas of research.

1 See Böhme, Hartmut/Scherpe, Klaus R. (1996): *Literatur und Kulturwissenschaften. Positionen, Theorien und Modelle* (Reinbek), pp. 8-10.

2 We would have liked more of these. The fact that we could attract only a few authors from subfields that are our immediate neighbors shows that networking among colleagues is still in its beginnings.

This to establish will be a first task. Only if placed upon such a foundation, can our work hold its own and flourish in broader interdisciplinary and comparative scenarios.<sup>3</sup>

## 1. Opening the Gates

In Arabic studies in the German language, the term *Literaturwissenschaft* probably first appeared in 1937. In a small programmatic treatise entitled "Concepts and Tasks of the Study of Arabic Literature"<sup>4</sup> Gustav E. von Grunebaum diagnosed the "silting" of Arabic literary study in philology and textual editing. These had become, according to him, self-fulfilling pursuits that neither shared "the intellectual standard of their parallel disciplines" – the fields of the Western literatures – nor purported "to contribute, beyond the intrinsic value of their results, toward the one human and humanistic goal of knowledge, namely the quest for the human spirit in all its forms and transformations" (p. 147).

In view of the complex obstacles, precluding a simplistic transfer of "occidental principles of categorization" to Arabic studies, von Grunebaum argued in favor of continuing to view and conduct research on Arabic literature as "literary history" (p. 146). Nonetheless, he was the first to advocate a cautious and controlled opening towards the kind of aesthetic inquiry pursued in "the study of occidental literatures" – an opening that should be, as he stressed, "exclusively goal-oriented, i.e., serving greater scholarly attainment" (p. 148). Within the theory transfer to the idiosyncratic body of written Arabic heritage, von Grunebaum thought the greatest risk to be the adoption of value judgments arising out of Western aesthetics. Similarly, Arabic studies should be guarded from the shaky foundations of short-lived systems of literary speculation, which the field should shun, if for no other reason, because of its limited human resources (pp. 147-48).

More than sixty years have passed since von Grunebaum critiqued and reformed subtly yet clearly the modes of inquiry in Arabic studies. Long since, the discipline has transcended its traditional thematic and methodological boundaries. Although its tasks in the areas of text sourcing and editing are tendentially infinite, and the systematic investigation of language, motifs, and literary forms is still ongoing, the progress made in these areas has been remarkable. Through the work of many generations of scholars, Arabic studies has created a solid basis leading to further inquiry.

After World War II, the paradigms of historicism and positivism in Near Eastern Studies receded, in an initially protracted movement, into the background, and the field

3 That the time is ripe to accept these challenges is also the well-founded appeal of the editors of a recently published special issue of the periodical *Arabica*, see: Cheikh-Moussa, Abdallah/Toelle, Heidi/Zakharia, Katia: *Pour une re-lecture des textes littéraires arabes: Éléments de réflexion*. In: *Arabica* XLVI, nos. 3-4, Juillet/Octobre 1999, pp. 523-540.

4 Grunebaum, Gustav E. von (1937): *Begriff und Aufgaben der arabischen Literaturwissenschaft*. In: *Archiv Orientalní* 9, No. 1-2, pp. 146-152. Cf. also Klemm, Verena (1996): *Arbeitskreis zum Thema: Theoretische Wege zur arabischen Literatur: Neue Perspektiven und Projekte*. In: *Die Welt des Islams* (WI) 36, Nr. 2, pp. 258-261.



opened itself to the scholarly discourses of neighboring disciplines.<sup>5</sup> Simultaneously, the areas of research expanded to include contemporary developments in the Arab world. In the study of Arabic, this innovative trend made itself felt most distinctly at first in a broadening of its range of inquiry, which had previously been dominated by Classical Arabic. Since that time, modern Arabic has received increased attention from the viewpoints of structuralism, sociolinguistics and dialectology. The focus in the investigated literature, which until well into the 1960s had been focused mainly on early Islamic "classical" and, to a much lesser degree, "post-classical" poetry and prose, now came to include the contemporary literatures of the Near East as well.<sup>6</sup>

Since then, next to the literatures in Modern Standard Arabic, colloquial materials have also become more frequent subjects of research. In the same vein, increasing space is occupied by the literary productions of politically or socially marginalized groups, such as women, ethnic or religious minorities, and movements, such as Arab nationalists, Palestinians, and Islamists, including considerations of the specific circumstances leading to their rise.<sup>7</sup>

5 Johansen, Baber (1990): *Politics and Scholarship: The Development of Islamic Studies in the Federal Republic of Germany*, in: Ismael, Tareq Y. (Ed.): *Middle Eastern Studies. International Perspectives on the State of the Art* (New York), pp. 71-130; Concepts of historicism lingered in the cultural disciplines even after being abandoned by historians, see Oexle, Otto G./Rüsen, Jörn (Eds.) (1996): *Historismus in den Kulturwissenschaften* (Wien), pp. 158f. and Schulze, Reinhard (1996): *Orientalistik und Orientalismus*, in: Ende, Werner/Steinbach, Udo (Eds.) (1996): *Der Islam in der Gegenwart* (4. revised and expanded edition, München), pp. 707-717.

6 It is certainly true that the scholarly tradition of Arabic studies is accompanied by sporadic efforts of investigating the contemporary literature of the Arab Middle East. An inventory of past research and a program for the future has already been presented by Georg Kampffmeyer (1925): *Arabische Dichter der Gegenwart*, 1. Stück. In: *Mitteilungen des Seminars für Orientalische Sprachen zu Berlin* (MSOS), Jahrg. XXVIII, Abt. II Westasiatische Studien, pp. 249-254, continued *ibid.* Jahrg. XXIX, 1926, Abt. II, pp. 173-206 and Jahrg. XXXI, 1928, Abt. II, pp. 100-169, followed by *Die Anfänge einer Geschichte der neueren arabischen Literatur*, *ibid.*, pp. 170-179. The last study represents a discussion of H.A.R. Gibb's (1926/1927) *Studies in Contemporary Arabic Literature*, pt. I: *The Nineteenth Century* (Bulletin of the School of Oriental Studies (BSOS), London Institution, vol. IV, pt. IV, pp. 743-760). To our best knowledge, works of salient modern Arab literati were first presented by Jacob Landau, in a survey arranged by country, in the German edition of Gibb's *Literary History* (2nd revised edition, 1963). This author from Jerusalem also discussed the literati's social and political agendas and offered insight into literary life, for instance literary criticism and magazines; see Landau, Jacob M. (1968): *Arabische Literaturgeschichte der neuesten Zeit – 20. Jahrhundert*, in: Gibb, Hamilton A.R. / Landau, Jacob M.: *Arabische Literaturgeschichte* (Zürich und Stuttgart), pp. 189-288. A recent study offers a survey of German areas of research in Arabic Studies, including the history of their inception: *Bestandsaufnahme. Kultur- und sozialwissenschaftliche Forschung über die muslimische Welt in der Bundesrepublik Deutschland*, Redaktion Ekkehard Rudolph (Deutsches Orient-Institut, Hamburg 1999).

7 Reuven Snir has remarked that in general, Western critics and scholars of Arabic literature still adhere to a traditional, narrow concept of it, which does not embrace the whole spectrum of contemporary literature of the region. He points to the enormous amount of original and translated books in various popular fields, such as spy literature, science fiction, high and popular journalism and children's literature, which scholars have hardly acknowledged so far: Snir, Reuven (1998): *Synchronic and Diachronic Dynamics in Modern Arabic Literature*, in: Ballas, Shimon/Snir, Reuven (Eds.): *Studies in Canonical and Popular Arabic Literature* (Toronto), pp. 87ff.

The opening up toward the theoretical concepts and methods of literary scholarship as well as toward other new trends within the humanities, cultural disciplines and social sciences has taken place mainly since the 1980s, following a preliminary phase during the 1970s. For the first time, Renate Jacobi, in her concise review of research on classical Arabic poetry, welcomed the emerging innovative movement and its interdisciplinary orientation as positive, promising and fertile.<sup>8</sup> According to Jacobi, the movement encourages the replacement of static ideas with dynamic concepts. As the most urgent goal, she sees however the moving of Arabic poetry out of its exotic corner, making it accessible to comparative literature and comparative studies in general. Naturally, Jacobi's constructive assessment can be applied to all Near Eastern literatures. Her appeal coincides with the second task: to establish an active dialogue between Near Eastern literary studies and other fields.

## 2. The Current State of Individual Theory Application in Germany: The DOT-Workshops and Their Purpose

What was still unthinkable at the time of von Grunebaum has today become a challenging opportunity: in spite of waning support at German universities, growing numbers of Arabists, Iranianists and Turcologists devote themselves to research on classical and modern poetry and prose. Individually, they have begun to incorporate theory into their discussions of classical and modern Arabic, Iranian and Turkish literature. Their approaches derive almost entirely from the abundance of theories and methods of modern literary scholarship, which itself perpetually imports concepts and ideas from neighboring disciplines, including philosophy, psychology, linguistics, and anthropology. This has led to a plethora of interpretative models, judiciously adapted to specific works, genres or other significant text groups; models that succeed in highlighting aspects previously undetected. The result is a situation in which the variety of research projects, planned or published in recent years, all but equals the variety of discourses and methods on which these projects are based.

One should certainly welcome this rapid development, which has supplanted the heretofore largely self-sufficient way of working in the study of Arabic, Iranian and Turkish literatures. Nonetheless the continuous broadening of discourses and methods in Near Eastern literatures as disciplines needs to be reflected to safeguard the adequate treatment of their philological material.

Interdisciplinarity means more than an unprepossessed opening toward new multiperspectival insights that might sensibly complement and deepen the view and method devised in our home discipline. In practice, interdisciplinarity begins for each of us individually as a confrontation with an unfamiliar approach and the question of the transferability of its categories and concepts, as already invoked by von Grunebaum. Each scholar is thus required to examine to what extent externally developed concepts can

<sup>8</sup> Jacobi, Renate (1987): *Allgemeine Charakteristik der arabischen Dichtung*, in: Gätje, Helmut (Ed.): *Grundriß der arabischen Philologie*. Vol. 2: Literaturwissenschaft (Wiesbaden), pp. 7-19.



suit his or her Near Eastern sources. This implies a scholar's critical reflecting upon and potential modifying of paradigms, concepts, and methods. Another aspect is the trace in many models and concepts of the Western material, which they were based upon. Here, an application to Near Eastern literatures goes hand in hand with the selection of a suitable variant and a redefinition.

This challenge is coupled with a problem of communication. Due to under-financed and understaffed research facilities in the extremely specialized philological-historical fields, an innovative scholarly project often represents a risky venture. For a long time, European scholars of Arabic had no forum to debate interdisciplinary projects and the concomitant questions of the applicability and productivity of methods gleaned from literary studies. The first effective bodies were created during the 1990s; when for instance EMTAR (European Meeting of Teachers of Arabic Literature), an international association of Arabists, founded a European forum, and devoted meetings to themes in modern Arabic literature every other year. However, discussions of method do not occupy a paramount position here.<sup>9</sup> At the 26th Congress of the German Oriental Society (Deutsche Morgenländische Gesellschaft) in Leipzig in 1995 (26th DOT), a workshop entitled "Theoretical Approaches to Arabic Literature: New Perspectives and Projects" convened for the first time. The gathering had been planned initially as a forum for the presentation of current research and degree projects in Arabic studies. These were discussed in open session with special regard to their theoretical and methodological aspects and problems.<sup>10</sup> Seeing that scholars of other Near Eastern literatures obviously share the same heterogeneity of method, the workshop was expanded to include Iranian and Turkish literatures in the subsequent 27th Congress (27th DOT), held in Bonn in 1998, and, accordingly, renamed "Theoretical Approaches to Near Eastern Literatures: New Perspectives and Projects." The positive reception of both workshops and the constructive discussions within them have led us to use this publication as a forum to present their projects to a larger audience.

The authors (not all of whom have participated in the workshops) were asked to give concise examples of their interdisciplinary work. We requested that they name their theoretical approach and critique or comment on it in terms of its compatibility and range of application; this was to be followed by a potentially modified use of the approach with Arabic, Persian or Turkish sources. Here, the authors were given the greatest possible creative range, regarding the structure and "depth of field" of their selected text(s). We did not strive for didactic model analyses.<sup>11</sup>

9 Two publications originating from these meetings have thus far appeared: Allen, Roger/Kilpatrick, Hilary/de Moor, Ed (Eds.) (1995): *Love and Sexuality in Modern Arabic Literature* (London); Ostle, Robin/de Moor, Ed/Wild, Stefan (Eds.) (1998): *Writing the Self. Autobiographical Writing in Modern Arabic Literature* (London).

10 Cf. Klemm in n. 4; Kilpatrick, Hilary (1998): *XXVI. Deutscher Orientalistentag, Leipzig, September 1995: Theoretical Approaches to Arabic Literature: New Perspectives and Projects*. In: *Arabic and Middle Eastern Literatures* (AMEL) 1, No. 1, pp. 113-116.

11 In this our approach differs from that of David. E. Wellbery (Ed.) (1993): *Positionen der Literaturwissenschaft. Acht Modellanalysen am Beispiel von Kleists "Das Erdbeben in Chili"* (München). We

### 3. Purpose of the Book: Communication and Feedback on New Approaches to Near Eastern Literatures

Through the presentation of individual approaches, this volume offers a glimpse into the current state of Near Eastern literary studies. Beyond that, it aims to consolidate these theoretical advances. Thus, the volume goes far beyond showing the variety of hermeneutical and empirical methods with which we re-discover and re-analyze Arabic, Iranian and Turkish literatures; rather it demonstrates systematic work with these selected theoretical premises, to which we owe our fresh epistemological perspectives of Near Eastern literatures and literary cultures. At present Near Eastern studies is still removed from the processes of theory formation, which mainly occur within Western and comparative literature. While this state of isolation cannot last, it does not come exclusively as a disadvantage at this point in time. During this still tentative stage of theory application, Near Eastern scholars are not beholden to the fast-paced internal dynamics of theoretical discourse, but they are free to choose any approach (or combination of approaches) that responds to the issues and problems governing a set of source materials. The volume's resulting methodological range, which may surprise the reader, speaks clearly of the authors' perceptiveness in letting their choice of approach be guided by the targeted texts and contexts. In their contributions, the authors explain and discuss their theoretical premises as well as criticize and modify imported models in the process of their adaptation. In a further step, the authors concisely report on the application of concepts to their source material and its results.

By presenting a number of case studies, we hope to facilitate their critique and foster further cooperation among Near Eastern and other disciplines, which still remain divided by institutional and ideological boundaries. The resulting exchange can prosper on four levels. (1) It engenders a long overdue discussion of method within Arabic studies. (2) It bridges the *de facto* division between the Near Eastern literary subfields, which share more than the challenge of interdisciplinary methodology. Above all, they are united by the historical and cultural sphere from which their texts derive, and whose writers share – with all their particular developments – epochal experiences, such as colonialism and post-colonialism. These commonalities of Near Eastern literatures offer comparative studies a promising ground, which has hardly been realized as yet (cf. the contributions of S. Guth and H. Kilpatrick in this volume). (3) Of similar importance as the internal cooperation among the Near Eastern fields is their integration into the framework of comparative literature (*Vergleichende Literaturwissenschaft*). This discipline lags behind global intercultural trends and epistemologies, because it marginalizes, if not outright excludes, many non-Western literatures. Only recently in the U.S., has the study of Near Eastern literatures been linked structurally or institutionally with comparative literature, whether through joint degree programs or integrating Arabic

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drew inspiration from other aspects of Wellbery's concept, however, and thank Stephan Guth for this valuable reference.



studies into comparative literature.<sup>12</sup> In Germany however, comparative literature has yet to express serious interest in the cultures and literatures of the Near East, not to mention institutional connections with Near Eastern studies.

(4) An even broader foundation for mutual change than comparative literature is provided by cultural studies (*Kulturwissenschaften*), which has been debated and tested initially in the Anglo-Saxon realm, and in recent years in German-language scholarship as well. Thus the Orient Institute of the German Oriental Society (DMG) in Beirut was instrumental as a forum of exchange under the visionary and inspiring direction of Angelika Neuwirth (1994–1999). Conferences held there brought into focus the connections between Classical and Modern Arabic literature, those among the different Near Eastern literatures and even German literature under the theoretical umbrella of cultural studies, aesthetics of reception, and literary genre.<sup>13</sup> The investigative perspectives of cultural studies (*Kulturwissenschaften*) in particular, whose vivid and far-ranging theoretical debates are far from closed, have been proposed as a reflective meta-level for the fields of sociology, history, religious studies, ethnology, and anthropology.<sup>14</sup> The philological fields, ushered out of their isolation from other discourses, can only gain from integrating themselves into these new conceptual frameworks. This means that above and beyond their own, internally developed, canons and interpretative models of source texts, they may view these texts as “the way of reading and writing of a culture” or as elements of transcultural trends and commonalities.<sup>15</sup> An example of the former would be an analysis of the aesthetically “inferior” Islamist literature; and of the latter, the inclusion of bilingual and Francophone writers as part of Arabic diaspora literature.

At this time, the challenge for Near Eastern literary studies consists of devising a new interdisciplinary self-image. Only with theoretically and conceptually well-conceived underpinnings, can an engagement with external discourses and strategies of research

12 An example of the former is the Arabic-Islamic interdisciplinary track of the Department of Near Eastern Languages and Civilizations, Yale University, New Haven, Connecticut; and, of the latter, the Department of Comparative Literature, Brown University, Providence, Rhode Island. This being said, the generally small Near Eastern Studies Departments or Programs, combined with the greater flexibility of the humanities in the U.S., often permit a student to arrange a cross-disciplinary curriculum or thesis project individually.

13 See Assmann, Aleida/Assmann, Jan/Hardmeier, Christof (Eds.) (1983): *Schrift und Gedächtnis. Beiträge zur Archäologie der literarischen Kommunikation I* (München) and the following four parts of this series, which includes some contributions on the Arabic-Islamic world. Devoted entirely to Near Eastern literatures and culture are Neuwirth, Angelika/Embalò, Birgit/Günther, Sebastian/Jarrar, Maher (Eds.): *Myths, Historical Archetypes and Symbolic Figures in Arabic Literature – Towards a New Hermeneutic Approach*. (Proceedings of the Symposium Held at the Orient Institute of Beirut, June 25<sup>th</sup>–30<sup>th</sup>, 1996) (Beirut/Stuttgart, 1999); Neuwirth, Angelika/Pflitsch, Andreas (Eds.): *Crisis and Memory*. (Proceedings of the Third Summer Academy of the Team *Modernity and Islam* at the Orient Institute of the German Oriental Society in Beirut, 10–25 September 1998) (Beirut, Stuttgart, forthcoming) and Neuwirth, Angelika/Bauer, Thomas (Eds.): *Ghazal as a Genre of World Literature*. (Proceedings of the Symposium Held at the Orient Institute of Beirut, July 7<sup>th</sup>–10<sup>th</sup>, 1999) (Beirut, Stuttgart, forthcoming).

14 Cf. Böhme, H./Scherpe, K.R. (Eds.) 1996, introduction (see note 1).

15 Following Bachmann-Medek, Doris (Ed.) (1996): *Kultur als Text. Die anthropologische Wende der Literaturwissenschaft*. Frankfurt a.M., p. 12.

grow into a mutually beneficial process of exchange. Near Eastern studies have to supply more than their own overdue need for investigative ideas and approaches. Of similar importance is the reception of its results and achievements by neighboring philological disciplines.

One may raise the objection that theoretical work should be left in the hands of its "proper" discipline, for instance, comparative literature, particularly in the North American academe, where these departments have become arenas of theory debate and formulation since the influx of continental theory and practice, notably deconstruction, in the 1970s. However, prompted by the rising voices of non-Western and diaspora literatures, comparative literature is itself undergoing a redefinition.<sup>16</sup> Still it cannot "pre-fabricate" theory for literatures that fall outside its prevailing linguistic domain. A recent conference, held by the Department of Comparative Literature at Yale University, explored the very question of how to theorize a new comparative literature as a global discipline.<sup>17</sup> The event illustrated the gulf that still divides the Western theoretical canon, constituted chiefly of English, French and German writings from disciplines centering on non-Western literatures, whether ancient, medieval or modern. In their claim to study the literary "other," scholars of comparative literature will have to broaden their linguistic foundations. But as much as comparative literature has to evolve, the Near Eastern disciplines have to meet it halfway, by offering theoretically enlightened interpretations of their literatures. Only through mutual approach can we establish the groundwork for the cross-cultural debates of the coming decades.

#### 4. Points of Convergence

Our wish for a more coherent theory application, has begun to be fulfilled at the DOT workshops, in which a number of contributions converged around four general issues: orality vs. literacy, intertextuality, comparativism, and postcolonial theory.

The first cluster explores the relationship between orality and literacy. Here the contributions illustrate the inadequacy of imported models and highlight the potential of Near Eastern material to help reformulate the relationship of oral and literal communication. Thus the current evolutionary bipolar conception of the two modes could be replaced with one of complementary and intermixing coexistence (cf. C. Ott and R. Haag-Higuchi).

Treatments of the second issue, intertextuality, respond to the characteristically continuous and self-reflective traditions of Arabic literature, which are not broken off in the modern period. Even writers of literary postmodernism look to their cultural heritage on the level of narrative strategy in order to confront their readers with new views of reality (B. Embaló, A. Pflitsch and A. Heinemann). In addition, Birgit Embaló draws on the

16 Cf. some contributions to the conference mentioned in the following note.

17 "Changing the Map. The Worlds of Comparative Literature," 5-6 February 1998, Yale University, New Haven, Connecticut (Proceedings forthcoming in the *Yale Journal of Criticism*).



unique and copious medieval tradition of poetic criticism in Arabic, in which issues of influence, such as emulation, borrowing, and allusion were standard subjects.

The contributions to the third issue, comparativism, show how a foray beyond the horizon of a single language (or, for that matter, beyond the horizon of all three major "Islamic" tongues) can help identify new questions and expose tacit assumptions. Comparativism also squarely faces the multi-ethnic and multilingual composition of Middle Eastern societies, whether dominated at a given time by Arabic, Persian or Ottoman Turkish (cf. H. Kilpatrick and S. Guth).

A large group is formed by studies on Modern Near Eastern literatures that treat, similar to other non-Western literatures, the fundamental problems of cultural contact and exchange with a politically and culturally dominating power. The viewpoints of the authors gathered here are very distant from the essentialist determinism of earlier positions in cultural theory. During the 1980s, the binary paradigm of cultural studies with the opposing poles of Orient and Occident, or tradition and modernity, vanished in favor of a "third space". Here, literature and art are symbolic expressions of modern, individual or collective, experience, such as fractured identities and dislocation. At the same time, the "third space" harbors a new multi-layered and de-centered creativity. In this volume, this sphere is observed from the angles of postcolonial studies (cf. F. Pannewick, B. Sagaster), discourse analysis (cf. S. Conermann), and reception theory (cf. V. Klemm).

Yet not all contributions to the volume can be fitted under these broad theoretical headings. A second group of scholars focuses on the sets of problems posed by particular text groups and devises genre-oriented models for their analysis and interpretation. These contributions include an analysis of 'Abbāsid praise poetry (*madīḥ*) in the light of dramatic discourse and speech-act theory (cf. B. Gruendler); a proposal to examine Islamic tradition (*ḥadīth*) on the basis of narratology (cf. S. Günther); and a move beyond current historical and literary approaches to classical biography by investigating its doctrinal content, historical background and literary conventions (cf. M. Cooperson). Two contributors examine the compatibility of Western generic approaches, namely whether European criteria for the definition and interpretation of autobiography can accommodate Arabic, particularly Palestinian, autobiography (cf. S. Enderwitz); and how far analytical models of historiographical metafiction, found in German and English literature, can be applied to the modern Turkish historical novel (cf. P. Furrer). Two further contributions are dedicated each to the Egyptian novel and demonstrate in an impressive manner the range of new research perspectives that are spurred by theoretical concepts from outside traditional Arabic studies. One offers a systematic analysis of *Tilka l-rāḥa* by Ṣun'allāh Ibrāhīm, conducted on the basis of a semiotic author-reader model of communication (cf. U. Stehli-Werbeck). The other illustrates an approach of anthropology and cultural studies, utilizing theories on liminality and ritual in a reading of the Cairo Trilogy by Najīb Maḥfūz (cf. Ch. Szyska). One author finally proposes to theoretically define a category of socio-literary performance (cf. A. Ziegler).

The authors' treatment of theory differs considerably. Some demonstrate the basic relevance and applicability of an approach (cf. S. Conermann, M. Cooperson, P. Furrer, S. Guth, B. Embaló, S. Enderwitz, V. Klemm, A. Pflitsch, B. Sagaster, U. Stehli-Werbeck, Ch. Szyska and A. Ziegler) occasionally including a critical evaluation of its descriptive and analytical potential. Others combine the application of an approach to Arabic and/or Persian material with substantial modifications, such as in the analysis of Arabic poetry (cf. B. Gruendler, A. Heinemann) and the refining of the gradations between orality and literacy and the discovery of overlap between them (cf. C. Ott, R. Haag-Higuchi). The latter two contributions also illustrate how much the Western concept of orality and literacy can gain from its exposure to Near Eastern literatures. Several contributions even transcend our project of theory application by postulating theoretically novel areas of work and alternative visions: Hilary Kilpatrick argues in favor of the Eastern Mediterranean as a geographical framework for the comparative study of its classical and modern literatures, breaking them out of their commonly assumed "Islamic" mold; Sebastian Günther evaluates the relevance of narratology for the genre of Ḥadīth, analyzed to date exclusively from an historical or theological vantage. Taking as a *point d'appui* Edward Said's criticism of European orientalist perceptions, Friederike Pannewick proposes an anti-hegemonic model which fosters a better understanding of the intercultural exchange processes that characterize the development of modern Arabic theatre. Susanne Enderwitz extracts the specific criteria and particularities of Palestinian autobiography through critically reviewing the philosophical and historical concepts developed for Western autobiography. We understand these revisionist contributions to be appeals for a connected and comprehensive manner of working.

### 5. Future Goals: Internally Developed Theory

Based on the present activity in selecting, critiquing, and applying theory, it is to be expected that Near Eastern literatures themselves will give rise to theory formulation not too far in the future. In Near Eastern anthropology, this has already occurred with the work of Pierre Bourdieu, who formulated the concepts of habitus and symbolic capital, and Clifford Geertz, who defined the meaning of cultural interaction within a symbolic anthropology.<sup>18</sup> In the literatures of the Near East, an array of unique genres and their performative and transmissional modes of existence allow us to envision a comparable formulation of theory. The genres of the dispute poem (*munāẓara*), the transmitted account (*khābar*), the *maqāma*, and the prosimetrical subtypes of *adab*, to mention only a few, deserve consideration in their own right. The same applies *mutatis mutandis* to literary motifs and figures, such as the digression (*istitrād*), or broader con-

18 See Bourdieu, Pierre (1972): *Esquisse d'une théorie de la pratique, précédée de trois études d'ethnologie kabyle*, (Geneva) [engl. trans.: Bourdieu, Pierre (1977): *Outline of a Theory of Practice* (Cambridge UK)] and Geertz, Clifford (1973): *Thick Description: Toward an Interpretative Theory of Culture*, in: idem (Ed.) *The Interpretation of Cultures* (New York), pp. 3-30. For an assessment of both, see Abu-Lughod, Lila (1990): *Anthropology's Orient: The Boundaries of Theory on the Arab World*, in: Sharabi, Hisham (Ed.) *Theory, Politics and the Arab World: Critical Responses* (New York and London), pp. 85-89.



cepts, such as unavowed authorship or dialogical structure of texts. Moreover, the nature of Arabic as an artificial literary idiom of great longevity, cultural prestige, dense intertextuality, and interconnected oral and written modes of transmission calls for its own assessment, preferably in comparison with other, pre-modern non-European literatures, such as Sumerian, Akkadian, or Chinese, which partially share these traits.<sup>19</sup> This work has already begun with two volumes, on dispute poetry and prosimetron respectively, which assemble a vast array of primarily pre-modern and non-Western literatures, and demonstrate the fruitfulness of "de-centered" comparativism.<sup>20</sup> But more remains to be done.

These few remarks only guess the potential of Near Eastern literatures. If understood and theorized on their own terms, their specific traits can contribute to a far richer and more diverse understanding of literature in general. At the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, Near Eastern Studies has become a solidly grounded discipline. Yet its major challenge lies in demonstrating its value to academia as a whole, by sharing the ideas it constantly gleans from a still vast and uncharted field, which enables it to enrich and broaden the horizons of related disciplines. It is hoped that what has begun as isolated attempts will mature into a more connected mode of inquiry in the future, ushering the study of Near Eastern literatures out of its isolation.

Beatrice Gruendler

Verena Klemm

19 These ideas were the subject of (unpublished) presentations by William Hallo, Beatrice Bartlett and Beatrice Gruendler in a panel discussion on the "Concept of Canon in Ancient Near Eastern, Arabic and Chinese Literature," 25 February 1999, Department of Near Eastern Languages and Civilizations, Yale University.

20 See Reinink, Gerrit J./Vanstiphout, Herman L.J. (Eds.) (1991): *Dispute Poems and Dialogues in the Ancient and Medieval Near East. Forms and Types of Literary Debates in Semitic and Related Literatures* (Leuven); and Reichl, Karl/Harris, Joseph (Eds.) (1997): *Prosimetrum. Cross-Cultural Perspectives on Narrative in Prose and Verse* (Cambridge UK).